



BIAS OF FACTS IN HISTORY WRITING: WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE BURANJIS

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ABSTRACT

The problem of bias is fundamental at all preventing no one can teach or write history whether he is aware of it or not because history is not an exact science but interpretation of human affairs, opinions and variations of inevitable factors. Bias means having an unfair or unbalanced opinion. Since history is a subject, where people express their opinions it means we have to be very careful to watch out for bias. In regard to the trends in history writing of Medieval Assam, we find that the *Buranji's* forms an important source in order to reconstruct the history of Assam, but with close analyze of this source one can find that it is too not free from bias. Therefore, this paper seeks to give an overview of the biasness in history writing where special focus has been given on the *Buranji's*.

KEY WORDS: Facts, History writing, Tai Ahom, *Buranji's*.

INTRODUCTION:

In historical writings, facts played a pivotal role. Historical facts are those written or unwritten evidences upon which history has been constructed. A debate arose among the scholars regarding the biasness of historical facts. The term bias means an unfair or unbalanced opinion. Scholars think that in history objectivity cannot be attained due to the biasness of historical facts. A historian's perception is a product of his circumstances, that is why in recording any data or evidence by a historian is also an outcome of the influence of the surrounding. The data recorded by a historian may not find the same importance in the eyes of the other historian. Again, historians analyze historical sources in different ways. Although historians can infer particular fact about the past from the evidence available to them, the way they give meaning to those facts by presenting relation between them is a function of their own creative imagination constrained by no cognitive requirement whatever. (Behan, 2000)

The historian thinks where, when and why a document was created. They consider whether a source was close in location and time to an actual historical event. However, many historians may attempt to be objective, but it is impossible for the historians to be entirely free from bias. (Ali, 1978) History was thus, always carried with it a set of covert or overt ideas, and therefore has never been free from bias, because a historian is a social phenomenon, both the product and conscious or unconscious spokesperson to which he belongs. This paper seeks to analyze the causes and pattern of biasness in historical facts.

There are four common ways historical writing can be biased. (Behan, 2000) Firstly, historians sometimes misinterpret evidences, so that they are not justified in asserting that the inferences they draw about what happened in the past are true. Secondly, when historians compile an account regarding an institution, what they say about it may be justified and credible but the account may omit significant facts about the subject so that it is unbalanced or unfair.

Thirdly, the kind of bias is that the general description of the past that implies facts, which, on the evidence may be false. Fourthly, bias in history occurs in providing causal explanations of historical events when some of the events are mentioned, but not all the important causes are mentioned. Thus, it leads to a misunderstanding of the event as well as it provides misleading impression of the events.

Historian's actual behavior, interest may cause personal bias and this influences the historian when they make selection of evidences, interpretation of the evidences and draw inferences from data, construct historical explanations, so as to make them unfair. For example, although there are similarities between European and British historians regarding compilation of facts related to the independence of America, historians of both the countries gave the preference their respective opinions and approach, which resulted in different conclusion. (Ali, 1978) Similarly, in the Indian context different scholars viewed the event of 1857 differently. Some interpreted as a "first war of independence", whereas others termed simply as it is a sepoy mutiny.

Social environment leaves a major impact on human's mind. Historian's personality is marked by the social condition and he/she becomes prisoner of the social environment. Although, the historian's tries to be impartial, he sometimes unable to do so. Thus, the total neutrality from the historian cannot be expected.

On the other hand, the limited knowledge of the researcher on the subject, allows the historian to justify the utility of biased approach.

There is another kind of bias, which is known as cultural bias. It has indeed larger interest than personal bias of the historian. It has great influential as well as motivating effect on the historian's mind, which largely reflects on his research work. Cultural bias highlights differences among persons or groups. It is said that it is difficult to remove cultural bias than removing personal bias of the historian.

While writing history, it is seen that there is always a tendency in historical writing which is to be colored by the present ideas of the ages. For example, starting from the Greeks, who emphasized the rational interpretation of the history. Roman historians gave a political twist to it, German made philosophical interpretation of history, Marxists became more materialistic and gave importance to the economic interpretation of history. French provided socialistic articulation and the British, on the other hand gave the imperialistic interpretation of history. Thus, the nature of history varies according to the prevailing philosophy of time and even from historians to historians.

Now if we look into the historical writings of Medieval Assam, the period from the 13th century marks the period of historical developments in North East India. (Sharma, 2006) The Ahom kings who ruled in the Brahmaputra valley for almost six hundred years seem to have endowed with a very strong sense of history writing. (Sharma, 2006) They brought with them the tradition of recording events in a class of chronicles known as *Buranjis*.

Buranji is a Tai-Ahom word meaning, "store house of knowledge that enlightens the ignorant". (Bhattacharjee, 1986) The *Buranjis* were originally written in Tai language, until about the sixteenth century and from the seventeenth century, they came to be written in Assamese. (Phukan, 1987) These chronicles were official documents with each regaining king appointing his own scribe with the instructions to maintain records of events off all the important happenings in a chronological manner. (Sharma, 2006) However, if we look into the *Buranjis*, which forms an important document for writing Assam history, they are not free from bias. As S.L Baruah quoted, *Buranjis* were primarily state documents compiled for specific political purposes. (Baruah, 1986)

Buranjis as were compiled by the nobles under their immediate supervision of the rulers, they were intended to write in order to praise them. S.K Bhuyan further states, that they were mechanical replicas of the originals, they were abridged or enlarged according to the requirements of the individual families. (Sharma, 2006) If the noble concerned found that due emphasis were not given to the deeds and enterprises of the members of his family in the *Buranjis*, he would add additional material to serve his purposes.

The *Buranjis* on the other hand were largely dynastic histories. For example, *Tunkhungiya Buranji*, *Padshah Buranji*, *Din Buranji* etc. According to J.N Phukan (Phukan, 1987), the later *Buranjis*, which were written in Assamese language, were not reliable and were not free from bias. The writers of the Assamese *Buranjis* has to depend on the Ahom-*Buranjis* as their original source. However, they did not always depend on literal translations of the Ahom language *Buranjis*, in some cases they only collected the basic information from the Ahom language *Buranjis* and added their own interpretations, stories, or local tradition that were current to their accounts. He further commenting on the nature of the *Buranji's* literature mentions that, *Buranji's* written in Ahom language and Assamese language need to be compared, particularly for the linguistic inconsistency, in order to get a correct view of the information's available in the *Buranji's*. There is no doubt that the *Buranji's* contain a lot of valuable information in order to reconstruct the history of Assam, but this information is available to historians

for their interpretation. The later historians who started writing *Buranji*'s in Assamese language in the seventeenth century, had to depend on the Ahom language *Buranji*'s, in some cases they depend on literal translations of the Ahom language *Buranji*'s and in some cases they only collected the basic information from the original works. They even added their own interpretations, stories or local tradition that were current, to their accounts. (Phukan, 1987)

Apart from the *Buranjis*, the *Katha-guru-charita*, which was a late but comprehensive biography of Sankardeva and his apostles, refers in length about the vaishnava movement in Assam. (Sharma, 2000) There are *charit puthis* of other vaishnava preceptor too. According to Maheswar Neog, Charitputhis provide a lot of information's on social and economic conditions of the time that can be a source of corroboration and sometimes correctives to the information found at *Buranjis*. The purpose of the biographers was treat a sort of religious impact on the minds of the followers of the Vaisnava faith through the reconstruction of the life and career of the saints. However, M. Neog also states that the late *charit puthis*, which were mostly written after the death of Sankardeva and Madhabdeva, one has to be critical while using it as a source because they were not free from personal bias.

OBJECTIVES:

This study seeks to give an overview of the biasness in history writing with special reference to the *Buranji*'s.

METHODOLOGY AND DATA:

To enquire into the writing of history and interpretation of facts in it, historical method is used by taking contemporary Ahom chronicles called *Buranjis* as primary sources. In secondary sources several books and articles were used.

CONCLUSION:

Although it is true that historical writing cannot be absolute free from bias, only deliberate attempt can be made to create descriptions, interpretation and explanations of the facts in writing. Bias is not necessarily a bad thing in fact it can be useful as it led us to find what people believed or thought about a particular subject. What historians use to do is to try and find evidence for a lot of different sources so that they can form a balanced opinion themselves. Every piece of information and evidence must be viewed skeptically and critically. No piece of information must be taken at a face value. Each piece of evidence and sources must be crosschecked and compare with related sources and pieces of evidence.

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